

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area

*Duck Creek Fence Reconstruction and
Corcoran Spring Redevelopment*

DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2016-0057-EA

BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), White River Field Office (WRFO) is proposing to reconstruct one new section of fence that would improve management of wild horses within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (HMA) and to address resource concerns associated with wild horses gaining access to areas outside of the designated HMA boundary. The HMA boundary consists of a 137-mile perimeter. At this time, the WRFO proposes to reconstruct one new section of fence near the area of Duck Creek. The current fence is no longer adequate to keep wild horses from traveling outside the HMA because it has been damaged and/or destroyed and is no longer functional.

The Corcoran Spring development was originally constructed in the late 1970s for wild horses use in the HMA. The spring development fell into disrepair over time. In 2012, due to drought conditions, Corcoran Spring was ultimately reduced to a “mud pit” by wild horses and wildlife trampling the spring in attempts to use the limited water supply. The WRFO trucked in water to supplement Corcoran Spring and placed the water into a water tank in the area. The WRFO staff observed that the wild horses (and wildlife) in the area would not use the tank because it was an artificial watering system. The WRFO is proposing to reconstruct Corcoran Spring to provide a reliable source of water in the area for wild horses, wildlife, and livestock.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects as described in the White River Resource Area Proposed Resource

Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (1996). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context

The proposed projects are site-specific actions on BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. The proposed projects are located in two different locations within or adjacent to the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area boundary.

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this Proposed Action:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The Proposed Action is expected to meet the BLM's objectives for wild horse management of maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship consistent with other resource needs. The EA considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed fence section and the water redevelopment. The Proposed Action is expected to reduce the number of wild horses that gain access to areas outside of the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (Duck Creek Fence Reconstruction) and to aid in providing reliable water resources within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (Corcoran Spring Redevelopment). The Proposed Action would take place outside of nesting season to minimize the potential for impacts to migratory birds and would not violate the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. USFWS concurred with the "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" determination for two threatened plant species, which is further discussed under #9 below. None of the environmental effects discussed in the EA for the Proposed Action are considered significant.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.

With successful construction of the proposed fence, there would be a positive impact to public health and safety by reducing the ability of wild horses to gain access onto the public transportation system (County Roads). The proposed action would also protect the health and safety of the wild horses by keeping them off the road system and within the HMA. The Corcoran Spring Redevelopment has no or minimal effect on public health or safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, park lands, prime farmlands, or Wilderness Study Areas within the proposed project areas. See #8 below for information about cultural resources.

4. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Wild horse management has occurred since 1971. The Proposed Action is consistent with the Wild Horse and Burro Management Act and the WRFO Resource Management Plan Record of

Decision. The Proposed Action would aid in meeting the management objectives for wild horses in this area by keeping them within the boundary of the Piceance-East Douglas HMA. Thus, the Proposed Action is consistent with current existing management for wild horses in the area and is not expected to generate controversy.

The effects of the Proposed Action on the quality of the human environment are not considered to be highly controversial, and are well known and understood.

5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.

The Proposed Action has no known effects on the human environment that are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks, as demonstrated through the analysis in the EA.

6. Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The Proposed Action neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The action is compatible with future considerations of actions required to improve wild horse management in conjunction with meeting the objectives for habitat within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The Proposed Action is not related to other actions with individually significant, but cumulatively significant impacts. Future projects occurring within the proposed project areas would be evaluated through the appropriate NEPA process and analyzed under a separate site-specific NEPA document.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The Corcoran Spring project area was previously surveyed for cultural resources by the WRFO archaeologist on August 17, 2012. No cultural resources were identified within the project area. The Duck Creek Fence was surveyed for cultural resources by the WRFO archaeologist on March 28, 2016. The results of the inventory identified two new archaeological sites; 5RB 8614, an eligible open camp, and 5RB 8615, an isolated occurrence. Additionally, the Duck Creek Fence project will not repair the old historic fence, 5RB 8086.1, a non-supporting linear feature (i.e., not eligible). Given the design features in place to protect cultural resources, there will be no adverse effects to historic properties as a result of the Proposed Action.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973.

The listed species that may be affected by the Proposed Action are the Dudley Bluffs bladderpod and the Dudley Bluffs twinpod, both of which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Activities from fence construction such as trampling and direct loss from setting fence posts are expected to occur on approximately 50-100 individuals. Design features described in the Proposed Action are designed to limit disturbance to occupied habitat to the maximum extent possible. Construction of the fence would likely benefit bladderpod by decreasing accessibility to approximately 300 acres of BLM lands within the population.

The Corcoran Spring re-development could directly impact 8-10 twinpod plants. Design features in the Proposed Action would limit impacts to the maximum extent possible. The primary impacts are crushing and trampling from equipment and people working on the development. Indirect impacts would include continued trampling of plants by wild horse, livestock, and wildlife that would continue to use the area for water. This has been an ongoing impact at the site, and redevelopment of the spring is not expected to increase or decrease the level of this indirect impact.

The BLM consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who concurred with the “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” determination. Conservation measures developed as part of that consultation have been incorporated into the Proposed Action.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



Field Manager



Date